

MIDDAY MEALS

A Primer



EDUCATE, AGITATE, ORGANISE

RIGHT TO FOOD CAMPAIGN, 2016

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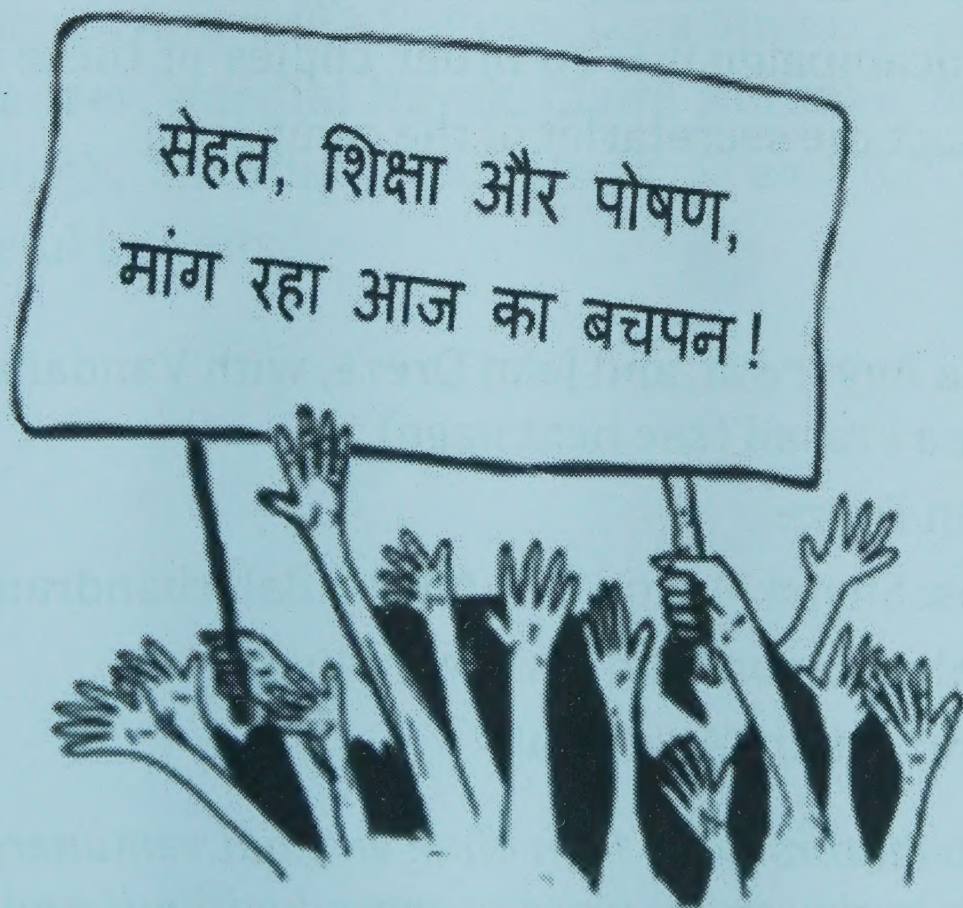
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MIDDAY MEALS: A PRIMER

September 2016

Every child who goes to primary or upper-primary school is entitled to a nutritious, cooked midday meal. This is an important step towards the right to food and the right to education. This booklet tells you what everyone should know about this basic entitlement of all Indian children.



Foreword

This booklet is part of a series of Primers prepared for the 6th National Convention on the Right to Food and Work (Ranchi, 23-25 September 2016). The purpose of these Primers is to help you to know your rights and how to defend them.

The Primers focus on different economic and social rights, including the right to information, the right to food, the right to work, forest rights, children's rights, the right to education, and more. They are written in simple language, for a wide audience.

The Primers are action-oriented: it is hoped that they will be used in collective struggles for social and economic rights. For further information as well as ideas for action, please take a look at the website of the Right to Food Campaign (righttofoodcampaign.in). To order copies of these primers, please contact the secretariat of the campaign.

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ABOUT THIS PRIMER...

This Primer is addressed to all those who are interested in joining the campaign for nutritious midday meals in Indian schools. Much can be done by different people at all levels, from remote villages to the national capital. But the first step is to understand the issues: why midday meals are important, what the Supreme Court orders say, how the quality of midday meals can be improved, and so on. This Primer attempts to answer these basic questions, and many more.

The preparation of this Primer was a collective effort. The first version was drafted by Vandana Bhatia, Jean Drèze, and Vandana Prasad in 2005. It was updated by Ankita Aggarwal in 2014 and by Ankita Aggarwal and Jean Drèze in 2016. Many others contributed in one way or another. Special thanks to Samir Garg, Shanti Ghosh, Tara Gopaldas, A.K. Shiva Kumar, Anuradha Rajivan, Dipa Sinha, Reetika Khera, Harsh Mander, Nandini Nayak, Claire Noronha, Shonali Sen, Devika Singh, Shantha Sinha, Vivek S. and C.P. Sujaya for many useful insights.

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INTRODUCTION

The condition of Indian children is best described as a permanent humanitarian emergency. According to the Rapid Survey on Children 2013-4, nearly 30 per cent of all Indian children below the age of five years are underweight. Hunger and undernutrition ruin children's health, undermine their learning abilities and impair their lives in many other ways. Very few countries, if any, have such high levels of child undernutrition.

Education statistics are no less alarming. In 2007-8, only 58 per cent of children in the age group of 15-19 years had completed eight years of schooling. This too, impairs their future in many ways. Child labourers are the worst victims.

This situation is a gross violation of the fundamental rights of children. Under Article 21 of the Constitution, all Indian children have a fundamental right to life. And as the Supreme Court has made clear on several occasions, the right to life is a right to live with dignity, which includes the right to food and related necessities.



School children are entitled to cooked mid-day meals as per the norms of the Food Security Act.

Under Article 21A of the Constitution (and the follow-up Right to Education Act 2009), all Indian children are entitled to free and compulsory education from the age of 6 to 14. These rights are also implied by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, to which India is a signatory.

The wellbeing of children is everyone's responsibility – not just that of their parents. Indeed, parents alone are not always able to protect their children's interests, especially when they are weighed down by poverty, illiteracy, poor health and social discrimination. This is one reason why the protection of children's rights depends crucially on social arrangements, such as universal schooling.

These arrangements are typically initiated by the state, but their effectiveness depends in many ways on the involvement of the public at large. For instance, the success of a village school depends a great deal on what the teachers, the parents, the Gram Panchayat and the village community actually do for it.

The provision of cooked, nutritious midday meals in schools is another example of social arrangement geared to the protection of children's rights. Their primary objective is to promote the right to food and the right to education, but they can also serve many other useful purposes (see below). Today, every child who attends a government or government-assisted school is entitled to a hot cooked nutritious midday meal, as per Supreme Court orders and also under the National Food Security Act 2013. However, this entitlement is far from being realised: the coverage of

midday meals is close to universal, but their quality still leaves much to be desired in several states.

Here again, public action is required to ensure that the state fulfils its legal and constitutional obligations. The question-answer dialogue below discusses what can be done to ensure that every Indian child actually gets a free, tasty and nutritious midday meal every day.

PART I: MIDDAY MEALS AND CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

Q1. What does the “right to food” really mean?

It means that every citizen has a right to be protected from hunger and undernutrition. The right to food places an obligation on the state to ensure that everyone is well nourished. This can be done through various means: land reform, the Public Distribution System, the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, and nutrition schemes for children, among others. These steps complement each other – no single intervention can ensure that the right to food is fully realised.

Q2. What is the right to education?

Every Indian child is entitled to “free and compulsory education” from the age of 6 to 14 years. In 2002, this became a “fundamental right” under Article 21A of the Constitution. Further, the Right to Education Act was passed in 2009. The State, therefore, must facilitate free education

for all children and ensure that each one of them attends school on a daily and regular basis.

Q3. How can midday meals contribute to the right to food and the right to education?

A healthy midday meal can help to protect children from hunger, and to improve their nutrition. Midday meals are not enough to guarantee the right to food, but they are an important step towards it. Similarly, cooked midday meals contribute to the right to education by facilitating regular school attendance and enhancing children's learning abilities.



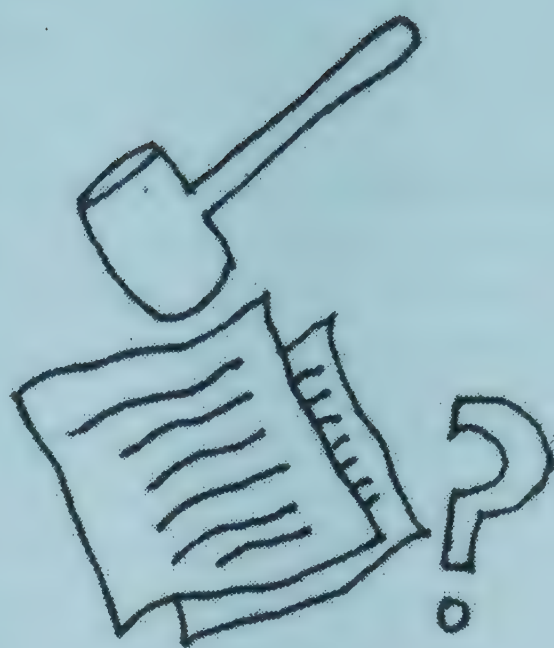
Midday meals also serve other important purposes, such as fostering social equality and imparting nutrition education to schoolchildren. The diverse roles of midday meals are discussed in Box 1.

Q4. Is every school-going child entitled to a nutritious midday meal?

Every child who attends a government or government-assisted school is entitled to a nutritious, cooked midday meal up to Class 8. This also applies in Education Guarantee Scheme (EGS) and Alternative and Innovative Education (AIE) centres as well as Madrasas/Maqtabs, which fall within the category of government-aided schools.

Q5. Is this a legal right?

Yes, it is a legal right because it derives from a Supreme Court order.¹ This order, dated 28 November 2001, directs all government and government-assisted primary schools to provide cooked midday meals. The National Food Security Act 2013 (NFSA) also recognises midday meals as a legal



entitlement of children, up to Class 8. Thus, children and their parents can demand school meals as a matter of right, and enforce this right through Courts (or the grievance redress provisions of the Food Security Act) if necessary.

Q6. What about children who are studying in private schools – are they also entitled to a midday meal?

No. The Supreme Court order and the National Food Security Act do not apply to private schools.

Q7. What about children below the age of six years, who are too young to go school?

These children are supposed to receive nutritious food under the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS). Despite repeated Supreme Court orders directing the

¹ This is an “interim order”, which applies until the final judgement of the case. However, the final judgement is unlikely to dilute this interim order.

BOX 1: WHAT CAN MIDDAY MEALS ACHIEVE?

If you feel that midday meals in schools are “a waste of time”, think again! The potential benefits of nutritious midday meals are many:

Promoting school participation: Midday meals have big effects on school participation, not just in terms of getting more children enrolled in the registers but also in terms of regular pupil attendance on a daily basis.

Preventing classroom hunger: Many children reach school on an empty stomach. Even children who have a meal before they leave for school get hungry by afternoon and are not able to concentrate, especially children from families that cannot give them a lunch box or live far away from the school. Midday meals can help to overcome this problem by preventing “classroom hunger”.

Facilitating the healthy growth of children: Midday meals can also act as a regular source of “supplementary nutrition” for children, and facilitate their healthy growth. For instance, midday meals rich in iron can help to prevent “anaemia”, a common cause of weakness and poor growth among children.

Intrinsic educational value: A well-organised midday meal can be used as an opportunity to impart various good habits to children (such as washing one’s hands before and after eating), and to educate them about the importance of clean water, good hygiene and related matters.

Fostering social equality: Midday meals can help to spread egalitarian values, as children from different social backgrounds learn to sit together and share a meal. In particular, midday meals can help to break the barriers of caste and class among school children. Appointing cooks from Dalit communities is another way of teaching children to shed caste prejudices.

Enhancing gender equity: The gender gap in school participation tends to narrow when midday meals are provided, as midday meals erode the barriers that prevent girls from going to school. Midday meals also provide a useful source of employment for women, and help to liberate working women from the burden of having to feed children at home during the day. In these and other ways, women and girl children have a special stake in midday meals.

children under six, this is yet to happen. More than a third of all children under six are still not covered by the programme.²

Q8. What about children who are not going to school at all?

Going to school is a fundamental right of every child. Ideally, all children should be going to school, and if this is the case, midday meals will also reach every child. In practice, about 3 per cent of Indian children in the age group of 6 to 14 years are still out of school. Perhaps midday meals should be extended to out-of-school children as well.

Q9. How did the Supreme Court come into the picture?

In April 2001, People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) filed a petition on the "right to food" in the Supreme Court. In those days, the godowns of the Food Corporation of India (FCI) were overflowing with grain. So much so that if these sacks of grain had been stacked in one vertical pile, they would have reached well beyond the moon. Meanwhile, millions of people were suffering from hunger and undernutrition across the country. PUCL argued that this idle grain should be used to protect people from hunger, for instance through food-for-work programmes, the Public Distribution System, and midday meals in schools.

The PUCL petition sparked a massive "public interest litigation" (PIL) on the right to food in the Supreme Court,

² If you are interested in this issue, see the companion Primer on ICDS.

known as “*PUCL vs Union of India and Others (Writ Petition [Civil] 196 of 2001)*”.³ In this litigation, PUCL took up the cause of the right to food on behalf of all those who are deprived of it, including hungry children.

It is in the context of this litigation, which continues today, that the Supreme Court issued sweeping “interim orders” on 28 November 2001. One of these orders directs all state governments to provide cooked midday meals in primary schools.



Q10. What was the situation before the Supreme Court order?

A few states, such as Tamil Nadu and Gujarat, already provided cooked midday meals in primary schools before the Supreme Court order (on Tamil Nadu, see Box 2). Other states were just providing “dry rations” (usually 3 kgs of

³ A public interest litigation is a court case fought on behalf of a whole section of the public by a petitioner who may or may not belong to that group.

grain per child per month) under the National Programme of Nutritional Support to Primary Education, initiated in 1995. Under this programme, state governments were actually supposed to start cooked midday meals, but most of them never went beyond “dry rations”, until the Supreme Court intervened.

Q11. Why are midday meals better than “dry rations”?

Cooked meals are better in many ways. While dry rations may help to increase school enrolment, they don’t help to ensure regular attendance. Midday meals, by contrast, are quite effective in that respect: they prompt children to go to school on their own, without much cajoling or coaxing from their parents. Midday meals also make it easier to retain pupils at school after the lunch break: it is easier to reconvene classes in the afternoon session when children take their lunch on the school premises. When they go home for lunch, they don’t always return!

And of course, unlike dry rations, midday meals prevent “classroom hunger”. Finally, midday meals have various “socialisation” roles, mentioned earlier (see Box 1), which cannot be played by dry rations.

Q12. Just out of interest, what else did the Supreme Court orders of 28 November 2001 say?

These orders focus on eight food-related “schemes”: Midday Meals, the Integrated Child Development Services, the Public Distribution System, Antyodaya Anna Yojana, Annapurna, the National Old Age Pension scheme, the National Maternity

BOX 2: MIDDAY MEALS: TAMIL NADU SHOWS THE WAY

Tamil Nadu was the first Indian state to provide universal midday meals in primary schools. Pioneer schemes were introduced as early as 1923 in Madras city. Large-scale provision of midday meals began in the 1960s under the Chief Ministership of K. Kamaraj. In 1982, Chief Minister M.G. Ramachandran ("MGR") extended midday meals to all primary schools.

It is said that the idea of midday meals occurred to Kamaraj after an encounter with a small boy who was looking after his cows and goats. When the Chief Minister asked him, "Why didn't you go to school today?", the boy replied, "If I go to school, will you give me food to eat? I can eat only if I earn." The boy's answer sparked the whole midday meal programme. MGR, too, experienced hunger as a child, and protecting other children from hunger became his mission.

Initially, MGR's bold move encountered much resistance. Many experts, bureaucrats and journalists dismissed the scheme as a waste of public money. However, midday meals turned out to be very popular, and over time, the scheme won wide acceptance. Successive governments have remained committed to midday meals, irrespective of political affiliation.

Today, midday meals have become an integral part of the school "routine" in Tamil Nadu. Every primary school has a staff of three: a cook, a helper, and an "organiser" who deals with logistics and accounts. Because there is adequate staff and infrastructure, the classroom process is undisturbed. A recent investigation of welfare schemes in Tamil Nadu, reported in *Times of India* (21 May 2003), had the following to say about midday meals:

"It was a joy to observe the mid-day meal programme in primary schools. Everywhere, the meals were served on time according to a well-rehearsed routine. The children obviously enjoyed the whole affair, and the teachers also felt very positive about this arrangement. Nowhere did we find any sign of the alleged drawbacks of mid-day meals, such as stomach upsets or disruption of classroom activity. Seeing this first-hand, one wakes up to the fact that midday meals should really be seen as an essential feature of any decent primary school, like a blackboard."

Sources: Anita Pratap, "Strike Against Hunger", *Outlook*, 18 August 2003; *Times of India*, 21 May 2003; http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mid-day_meals.

Benefit Scheme (NMBS) and the National Family Benefit Scheme (NFBS). Essentially, the Supreme Court orders of 28 November 2001 converted the benefits of these “schemes” into legal entitlements. This means, for instance, that if someone has an Antyodaya card but is not getting her full quota of 35 kg of grain per month at the official prices (Rs 3/kg for rice and Rs 2/kg for wheat), she can claim her due as a matter of right, by going to Court if necessary.⁴

Q13. How are these orders monitored?

In an order dated 8 May 2002, the Supreme Court appointed “Commissioners” to monitor the implementation of orders relating to right to food. The Commissioners are empowered to enquire about any violations of the orders and to demand redressal, with the full authority of the Court. They also submit periodic reports to the Supreme Court. These reports enable the Supreme Court to keep a close watch on the status of its orders, and to issue further orders as and when necessary.

Q14. How are the orders on midday meals implemented?

The overall responsibility for implementing the orders rests with the State Government. However, the Central Government provides financial assistance in various ways (see below).

⁴ If you are interested in this public interest litigation, and the “interim orders” that have been issued by the Supreme Court from time to time, please consult the sources listed in the Appendix to this booklet. Some of these orders are quite far-reaching and it is a good idea to study them.

Q15. Have state governments implemented the Supreme Court orders?

Initially, most of the state governments claimed that they had “no money” to provide midday meals in primary schools. But the Supreme Court took a firm stand on this and told them to “cut the flab somewhere else” [sic]. Campaigns for midday meals also sprang up all over the country. So midday meals were gradually introduced in one state after another, and today, they are in place almost everywhere.

There have been various follow-up orders on midday meals, relating for instance to the quality of the meals, the expenditure norms, the provision of infrastructure, and so on (see Box 3). In most states, these orders have been implemented to a large extent, but the battle for quality and regular meals is far from over.



BOX 3: SUPREME COURT ORDERS ON MIDDAY MEALS

The Supreme Court has been issuing "interim orders" on midday meals from time to time, starting with the landmark order of 28 November 2001. The key orders are summarised below. For further details, see the sources mentioned in the Appendix of this booklet.

Basic entitlement: "Every child in every government and government-assisted primary school should be given a prepared midday meal; with a minimum content of 300 calories and 8-12 grams of protein each day of school; for a minimum of 200 days a year." (*Order dated 28 November 2001*)

No charges: "The conversion costs for a cooked meal, under no circumstances, shall be recovered from the children or their parents." (*Order dated 20 April 2004*)

Central assistance: "The Central Government... shall also allocate funds to meet with the conversion costs of food-grains into cooked midday meals." (*Order dated 20 April 2004*)

Kitchen sheds: "The Central Government shall make provisions for construction of kitchen sheds." (*Order dated 20 April 2004*)

Priority to Dalit cooks: "In appointment of cooks and helpers, preference shall be given to Dalits, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes." (*Order dated 20 April 2004*)

Quality safeguards: "Attempts shall be made for better infrastructure, improved facilities (safe drinking water etc.), closer monitoring (regular inspection etc.) and other quality safeguards as also the improvement of the contents of the meal so as to provide nutritious meal to the children of the primary schools." (*Order dated 20 April 2004*)

Summer holidays: "In drought affected areas, midday meals shall be supplied even during summer vacations." (*Order dated 20 April 2004*)

Joint quality monitoring: "We direct the Union of India and the FCI to ensure provision of fair average quality grain for the Scheme on time. The States/UTs and the FCI are directed to do joint inspection of food grains. If the food grain is found, on joint inspection, not to be of fair average quality, it will be replaced by the FCI prior to lifting." (*Order dated 28 May 2001*)

PART II: OFFICIAL NORMS AND GUIDELINES

Q16. How are midday meal schemes funded?

Midday meals are jointly funded by the Central and State Governments. Each state has its own midday meal “scheme”.

Q17. What are the contributions of the Central and State Governments?

The Central Government supplies foodgrains free of cost (100 gms per child per day at the primary level and 150 gms at the upper-primary level), provides allowances for transporting grain from the nearest FCI godown to the school, and shares cooking costs with the state. Details of minimum mandatory contributions by Central and State Governments, as of 1 July 2016, are given in Box 4.

Box 4: Cost sharing between Central and State Governments					
Class	Cooking cost ^a	Centre-State sharing			
		North Eastern Region and Hill States (90:10)		Other States (60:40)	
		Centre	State	Centre	State
Primary	Rs 4.13	Rs 3.72	Rs 0.41	Rs 2.48	Rs 1.65
Upper-primary	Rs 6.18	Rs 5.56	Rs 0.62	Rs 3.71	Rs 2.47

^a Cooking cost includes the cost of pulses, vegetables, oils and fats and salt and condiments (and excludes the labour and administrative charges). There is a separate provision for payment of honorarium to cook-cum-helper (recently increased to Rs 2,000 per month, as per media reports). The cost of this honorarium is to be shared between the Centre and States on 60:40 basis (90:10 in North Eastern Region and Hill States). There is also separate central assistance for management, monitoring and evaluation – about 2% of total assistance.

Some states are using their own resources to contribute more than the minimum mandatory. For instance, Tamil Nadu spends Rs 4.46 per child per day and Andhra Pradesh spends Rs 2.65 per child per day in the primary classes. However, states like Bihar and Uttar Pradesh do not go beyond the minimum contribution Rs 1.67 per child per day.

Apart from financial resources, it is important that state governments “own” the midday meal scheme and back it fully. It is this involvement and political backing of the state government that makes midday meals much more successful in some states than others.

Q18. Can resources from other government schemes be used to improve midday meals?

Yes. In most states, some components of the midday meal scheme can be funded under other schemes. In rural areas, for instance, cooking sheds can be constructed under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), drinking water can be arranged under the Accelerated Rural Water Supply Programme (ARWSP), and funds for cooking utensils are available from Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA). In urban areas, similar facilities are available under schemes such as the National Slum Development Programme (NSDP) and Swarna Jayanti Shahri Rozgar Yojana (SJSRY).

Q19. How are cooks and helpers supposed to be appointed?

The cook and helper should be appointed with full

community participation. The parents and other villagers are meant to elect a “School Management Committee” (SMCs), as mandated under the Right to Education Act, which then choose cooks and helpers from the community. As per Supreme Court orders of 20 April 2004, preference should be given to “Dalits, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes”.

Q20. Are midday meals provided during holidays?

This is not mandatory under Supreme Court orders, but it is a good practice. Some states, notably Tamil Nadu, continue to serve cooked meals to school children even during holidays. Note also that a Supreme Court order dated 20 April 2004 makes it mandatory to provide midday meals during summer vacations in “drought-affected areas” (see Box 3).

Q21. Do children or their parents have to make any contribution to the cost of the meal?

No. Supreme Court orders categorically state that cooking costs should not be recovered from the children or their parents under any circumstances. Sometimes, schools encourage “voluntary donations” from the community, and this is not always a bad practice. But contributions should never be compulsory – all children are entitled to a free midday meal.

Q22. Are there provisions to avoid any discontinuation of midday meals?

In case of temporary non-availability of foodgrains or funds,

the school to ensure that there is no disruption in the midday meal. This is to be reimbursed to the school account as soon as midday meal funds are received.

Q23. What if some discontinuation does occur?

In the event where midday meals are not served in a school due to non-availability of foodgrains, funds, fuel, absence of a cook or any other reason, the state government is supposed to pay a food security allowance to the affected children. This allowance is to be paid by the 15th day of the next month as per norms given in the National Food Security Act.

In case midday meals are not served for three continuous school days or five days in a month, the state government is to take action and fix responsibility on the person or agency responsible for the disruptions.

Q24. What are the mechanisms for monitoring midday meals?

Every state is supposed to have a State Steering-cum-Monitoring Committee for overseeing the implementation of midday meals. The SMCs are also to monitor aspects of the scheme such as the quality of meals being provided, cleanliness of the cooking shed, etc.

Samples of meals being served to children are to be collected by the Food and Drugs Administration Department at least once a month from randomly selected schools. The samples should be sent for examination to an accredited laboratory, to ensure that midday meals meet the nutrition and quality specified in the National Food Security Act.

PART III: PRACTICAL ASPECTS OF MIDDAY MEALS

Q25. Doesn't the cooking and distribution of meals in the schools interfere with classroom activity?

This concern is well taken. However, if the midday meal is well organized, it should not disrupt classroom activities. This requires a good infrastructure, including for instance cooking sheds: if meals are prepared inside the classroom, you can imagine how difficult it would be for the teacher to conduct the classes (we will come back to that). Also important is a clear division of tasks between the cook, the helper, the teacher and the community. Each has a vital role to play in ensuring the smooth and hazard-free provision of midday meals.

Cook and helper

A cook and a helper must be employed to prepare the meal, without any assistance from children or teachers. The responsibility of the cook is to ensure that a tasty and nutritious meal is ready on time, every day. A helper is needed to assist the cook, and to facilitate clean and hygienic cooking as well as washing of the utensils. Until the meal is ready, the teacher is not required and must continue with his or her class timetable.

Teacher's responsibilities

The teacher should taste the food before it is served to the children, to check that no stale ingredients have been used

and that the meal is wholesome (rice and salt will not do!). The teacher should also supervise hand washing by the children, and perhaps also take this opportunity to look at their nails and general hygiene. The actual serving and consumption of the meal should also be supervised by the teacher so that it is done in an orderly and hygienic manner. The midday meal can also be used by the teacher as an opportunity for various educational activities: teaching good eating habits to children, training them to thank the cook and helper before eating, imparting some nutrition education, and so on.

In some states, teachers also have some organisational responsibilities as part of the midday meal scheme, such as keeping accounts or arranging the collection of grain from the ration shop. Ideally, this should be avoided, as it may divert teachers from classroom activities. In some states, each school has an “organizer” who takes complete charge of midday meals, leaving teachers free to teach. This is the best arrangement, in terms of avoiding any disruption of classroom activity.



Before children eat, the teacher must taste the food

Community Participation

Active Gram Panchayats and School Management Committees (SMCs) can play a very useful role in ensuring that midday meals are provided in a fair and efficient manner. These institutions, especially the Gram Panchayat, often have formal responsibilities as part of the midday meal scheme. In some states, for instance, the Gram Panchayat is responsible for arranging the purchase of cooking ingredients, fuelwood, etc. In many states, Mahila Mandals and Self Help Groups are actively involved in the management of midday meal schemes. Through these groups, the women of the community come into direct interaction with the schools. In Himachal Pradesh, for example, the Mahila Mandal is often in charge of cooking the food.

Aside from these formal responsibilities, active community participation can help in many ways. For instance, members of the community can informally “monitor” the midday meal and report any irregularity to the Gram Panchayat or other concerned authority. They should also be consulted when the cook and helper are appointed. Voluntary contributions from the community, for example in the form of kitchen utensils, cooking fuel, fresh vegetables, or dairy and poultry products, should be encouraged. The community can also help the school to set up a vegetable garden to enrich the midday meal.

In short, midday meals require a good infrastructure as well as effective use of human resources. If these safeguards are

in place, midday meals need not interfere with classroom activity.

Q26. What are the basic infrastructure requirements for an effective midday meal?

The basic infrastructure required for an effective midday meal includes:

Kitchen shed and storage facility: In the absence of a separate kitchen shed, cooking distracts students and hampers the learning process. Kitchen sheds are also essential from the point of view of safety – to avoid contamination, fires, accidents, and so on. There should be adequate protection from smoke through the use of chimneys, smokeless chulhas, exhaust fans or other devices. Storage facilities are a must to protect food against rodents and infestation. Ideally there should be a separate storage room that can be locked. It is also advisable to store grains in containers rather than sacks.

Clean water: A source of clean water should be available within the school premises. This facilitates safe and easy cooking. Clean water is also needed for drinking purposes, and for washing and cleaning. Children need to be taught basic hygiene such as washing hands before and after eating, and this can only be done if clean water is available in the school.

This also saves the cook the added burden of fetching water.



Cooking implements: Hygienic and hassle-free cooking requires a range of cooking implements, starting with a convenient stove or *chulha*. A common complaint of cooks is the irritation caused by smoke that collects in the kitchen in absence of clean fuel and adequate ventilation.

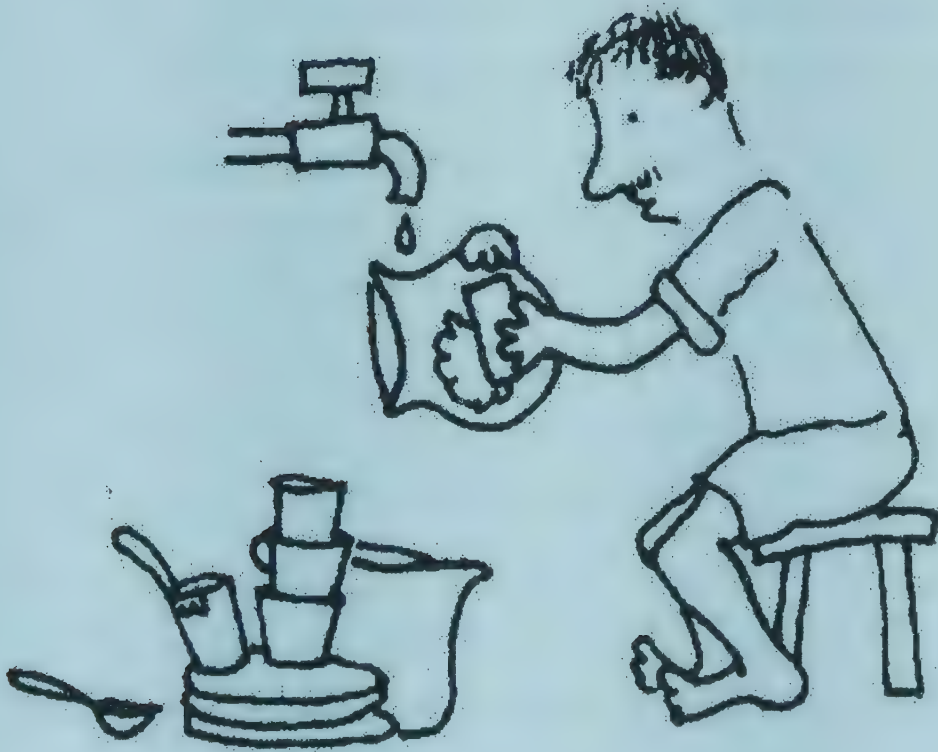
Large, flat-bottomed pots and utensils are needed to prepare food in big quantities. Other handy utensils include long-handled ladles for stirring and serving food, measuring devices for ingredients, sharp knives, lids, peelers, chopping boards, air tight masala containers and so on. These utensils should be washed properly with a good cleaning agent.



Fuel: Fuel arrangements vary from state to state. For instance, LPG cylinders may be provided to the schools, or fuelwood may be purchased locally. Fuel arrangements are often neglected, and this can lead to serious disruption of the midday meal. For instance, in some schools of Jharkhand teachers have to arrange for fuelwood. Next time you visit the local school, why not check that adequate fuel arrangements are in place?

Q27. What are the safety and hygiene measures to be followed in the preparation of midday meals?

Safety and hygiene are crucial for the success of midday meals. Lack of cleanliness occasionally leads to food poisoning: children fall sick and there is a backlash against the whole programme from parents and teachers. This is actually not difficult to avoid, but it requires paying close attention to safety and hygiene at all times. The cook and helper have a special responsibility in this respect. Anyone who is involved in the cooking process should maintain strict personal hygiene and other safety measures. Ten tips for safety and hygiene are given in Box 5.



BOX 5: TEN TIPS ON SAFETY AND HYGIENE

1. **Kitchen sheds:** Food should be cooked in a kitchen shed, located at a safe distance from the classrooms. The kitchen should always be clean. It should preferably have a raised platform for cooking, adequate light, a ventilation device, and arrangements for drainage and waste disposal.
2. **Food storage:** All these ingredients should be stored in proper containers, safely protecting them from moisture, pests, etc.
3. **Fuel storage:** Fuel should also be stored safely and separately from the kitchen, to avoid any fire hazard.
4. **Smoke:** As far as possible, “smokeless chulhas” should be used. Indoor smoke from ordinary chulhas is bad for the lungs and eyes.
5. **Hygiene:** All persons engaged in handling of ingredients, or in cooking and serving the midday meal, should follow hygienic habits (e.g. regular cutting of nails, tying of hair in the kitchen, washing hands and feet with soap before cooking).
6. **Food quality:** All cooking ingredients (foodgrains, pulses, vegetables, cooking oil, condiments, etc.) should be free from adulteration and pest infestation, and should be used only after proper cleaning, washing, etc.
7. **Cooked food:** After the food is cooked and ready to eat, it must be kept covered and protected from insects.
8. **Checkups:** It is important to ensure that the cook and helper do not suffer from any contagious disease, so that germs are not passed through the food. They should undergo regular medical checkups.
9. **Washing up:** All cooking and serving utensils should be properly cleaned and dried every day after use.
10. **Disposal of waste:** Waste must be disposed well and not thrown in the open.

PART IV: NUTRITIONAL ASPECTS OF MIDDAY MEALS

Q28. How can midday meals make a real difference to the nutrition of children?

The midday meal cannot claim to satisfy all the nutritional requirements of the child. However, it is a good opportunity to improve the nutritional status of a vast number of Indian children. This requires providing a nourishing meal and ensuring that most or all groups of essential foods are included (see Box 6).

Simple means can be used to enhance the nutritional value of common foods at little or no extra cost. These include sprouting, fermenting, using iron vessels and adding the edible leaves of vegetables. With a little creativity and imagination, locally available foods can add nutrition to the midday meals at low cost in most parts of the country. For example, some variety of *saag* (spinach) is available in most areas and can simply be added to the dal.

Q29. How much food should be cooked?

According to the official guidelines, it should be 100 grams of foodgrains per child per day for the primary classes and 150 grams per day in the upper-primary classes), supplemented with other items such as dal, vegetables, oil, spices etc. It is important to ensure that children are allowed to eat their fill. If required, additional resources should be mobilized to increase the quantity of food being cooked. If food routinely falls short, the first thing to check is whether any food or

funds are being “siphoned off”. Boxes 7a and 7b list the minimum norms as per MoHRD (Ministry of Human Resources Development) Guidelines and NFSA respectively.

BOX 6: NUTRITION FACTS

Cereal Grains and Products

Foods such as rice, wheat, jowar, bajra, ragi, maize etc., are in this group. These foods supply energy or calories, protein, invisible fats. They also contribute iron, thiamine, riboflavin, folic acid and fiber.

Pulses and Legumes

The foodstuffs in this group are pulses and legumes (beans, soya beans, peas, rajma, Bengal grams, etc). They provide energy, protein, invisible fat, Vitamin B1, Vitamin B2, folic acid, calcium, iron and fibres.

Milk, Nuts and Meat Products

They include milk, curd, skimmed milk, cheese, almonds, groundnuts, chicken, meat, liver, egg, fish and other flesh foods. All these foodstuffs supply mainly protein, fat, calcium and vitamin B2.

Fruits and Vegetables

These include green leafy vegetables, yellow or orange fruits and vegetables such as papaya, mango, carrots, tomato, pumpkin, stems, leaves and flowers of plants, ladies finger, brinjals, bittergourds and other gourds, cabbage, cauliflower, drumsticks. Fruits such as amla, lemons, orange are rich in minerals and vitamins, especially vitamin C and calcium, iron and folic acid and vitamin A. Other major nutrients are invisible fat, vitamin B2 and fibre. They provide variety in taste and texture and furnish roughage in the diet.

Fats and Sugars

All these foodstuffs supply energy or calories – vegetable oils, vanaspati, ghee, cream, sugar and jaggery. They add taste and flavour to the food, and are calorie dense. They can be used to enhance the caloric content of the small volumes of food children eat. In India, commonly available cooking oils include mustard oil, coconut oil, gingelly oil, groundnut oil, palmolein oil and sunflower oil.

Box 7a: Food Norms as per MoHRD Guidelines, 2015

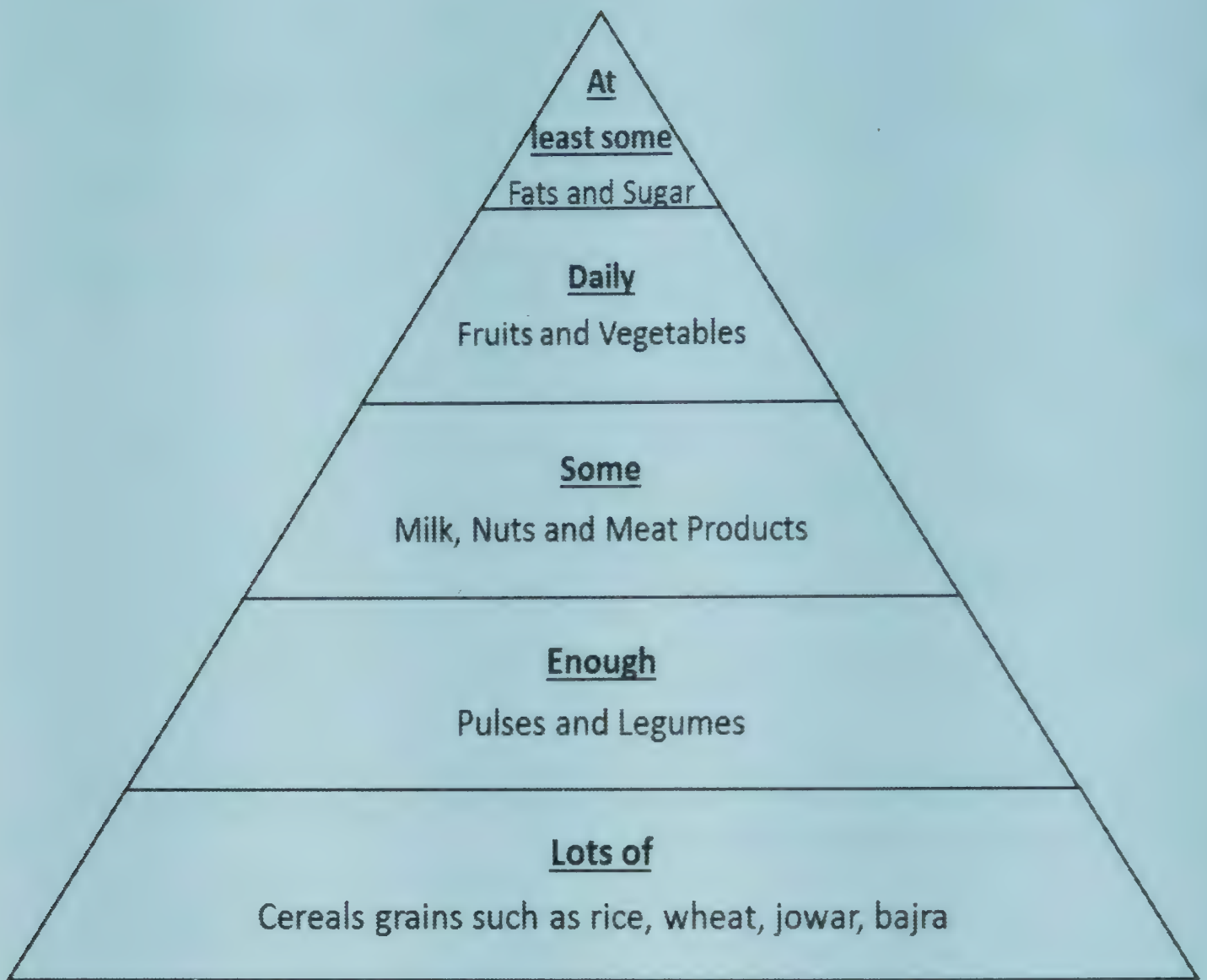
S. No.	Item	Quantity per day (grams)	
		Primary	Upper-primary
1	Foodgrains	100	150
2	Pulses	20	30
3	Vegetables (leafy also)	50	75
4	Oil and fat	5	7.5
5	Salt and condiments	As per need	As per need

Box 7b: Nutritional Standards of Midday Meals as per the National Food Security Act 2013

Nutrient	Primary	Upper-primary
Calories (Kcal)	450	700
Protein (grams)	12	20



Midday meal guidelines prescribe food variety in every meal



CONSTITUTE A BALANCED AND HEALTHY DIET

Q30. Should the same menu be followed day after day?

Not at all. In fact, efforts should be made to make the meal as varied, interesting and wholesome as possible. No single vegetable or fruit or grain contains all the essential nutrients. Variety in the meals also helps to ensure that the children eat well throughout the week.

It is possible to plan a low-cost yet varied and nutritious menu. This can be done in consultation with the local community, School Management Committees, women's Self-Help Groups and also nutrition experts (e.g. from Home Science Colleges). Items like pulses, green leafy vegetables, sprout lentils, eggs and milk, fruits like bananas can be given,

and more attractive and varied dishes can be made like dhokla, dal bhaat, dalia, kheer. Menus should be planned locally (at the district level or even below), as food resources and dietary patterns vary a great deal between different areas.

The official menus of several states are quite nutritious and diverse. For instance, Tamil Nadu serves eggs five times a week, apart from rice and sambhar. Eggs are also given in Jharkhand, Odisha and quite a few other states (usually with a fruit option for children who do not eat eggs). Other nutritious items found in midday meal menus include green vegetables, kabuli chana, fruits, milk and daliya.

Q31. What can be done to improve the health and nutrition of children through the school, in addition to midday meals?

A well-run “school health scheme” can be of great value in this respect. This could include growth monitoring, micronutrient supplementation (e.g. iron tablets), immunization, deworming as well as dealing with common ailments and conducting dental or eye checkups. It is also essential to ensure freely available potable water and accessibility to clean functional toilets for the children.

Number of Eggs, Glasses of Milk and Fruits served each week in School mid-day meals

Swati Narayan

2011-12

© d-maps.com



Source: Swati Narayan (www.righttofoodcampaign.in)

Created by Point 2

Part IV: What we can do

The near-universal coverage of midday meals in India is a victory of sorts as it reflects organised public pressure, with a little help from the Supreme Court. However, the quality of midday meals is still quite low in some states: the content and variety of the meals is inadequate, health safeguards are lacking and there are occasional interruptions in the meals. Addressing these challenges is again likely to require sustained public pressure, as children's rights tend to have a very low priority on the political agenda. Everyone can contribute to this effort: public action is needed at all levels, from remote villages to the national capital. And there is a role for everyone: parents, teachers, journalists, politicians, researchers, or just concerned members of the community.

There is no "recipe" to go about this. Much depends on local conditions and people's imagination. Therefore, no attempt is being made here to provide a blueprint for action. Rather, we list below some ideas and suggestions that have come up in this campaign. Many of them have already been used with good effect somewhere or other. We hope that these hints will help you to launch similar activities in your own area.

What to "investigate"

The first thing to do, as far as local action is concerned, is to find out the status of midday meals in your village or area. This can be done through informal enquiries (e.g. by visiting the school or enquiring from children), or through formal "surveys" (see below). Here are some examples of issues to "investigate" in one way or another:

- Are midday meals being provided regularly in the local school(s)?
- To what extent is the official menu being followed? Have adequate efforts been made to enhance the nutrition content of the meals using available resources, including creative resources such as growing a vegetable garden near the school?
- Are eggs being served regularly with the midday meal, and if not, why not? Can it be done?
- Have there been any incidents of social discrimination, such as a Dalit cook or helper being removed, or children of different castes being made to sit separately?
- Do the teachers, parents, cooks, helpers or children have any complaints about midday meals? For instance, have there been any incidents of food poisoning?
- Does the cook or helper face any difficulty that requires attention?
- Is the midday meal organised in such a way that classes are not disrupted?
- Is the required infrastructure available, including a kitchen



shed, storage arrangements, cooking utensils and clean water?

- Are the essential safeguards for safety and hygiene in place?
- Is there any evidence of corruption in the provision of midday meals?

These are just some illustrations of the key issues – the list can be expanded without difficulty in the light of local conditions.

How to complain

Suppose that you have noticed an “irregularity” in the provision of midday meals in your area. For instance, the midday meal has been disrupted in a particular school, or a Dalit cook has been removed by high-caste village leaders. Where and how should a complaint be made?

The best thing to do is start at the local level, and appeal to higher levels if you are unable to sort things out at the local level. For instance, if the problem concerns a particular school, it would be natural to speak to the teachers, the School Management Committee, or the Gram Panchayat. Often it is possible to solve the problem at that level, if it is dealt with in a constructive way.

If this does not work, try to find out which department is in charge of midday meals in your area. In official jargon this is called the “nodal department”. In some states, the Education Department is the nodal department, but it may also be

some other department such as the Department of Rural development and Panchayati Raj (in Rajasthan) or the Social Welfare and Nutritional Meal Department (in Tamil Nadu). The issue can then be raised with concerned officials in this department, for instance the Block Education Officer (BEO).

A public hearing or social audit is often a good way of drawing the public's attention to a particular issue, and of putting pressure on local officials to take action. If they don't wake up, various forms of "agitation" can be considered, such as a rally, dharna or gherao.

If a complaint is not getting attention through official channels, you can also approach the "advisor" to the Commissioners of the Supreme Court. Each state has its own advisor (see Appendix for further details). The advisor is often able to take up these matters with the state government and persuade it to intervene.

In cases of severe apathy or resistance from the local administration, a complaint can also be sent to the Commissioners of the Supreme Court in Delhi. Interventions from the Commissioners have often proved effective in the past. This is because the Commissioners act with the full authority of the Supreme Court, as far as the monitoring of interim orders is concerned. However, appeals to the Commissioners are best used as a last resort, when local action has failed. And these appeals should be well documented, to enable the Commissioners to demand specific action from the concerned authorities – typically the Chief Secretary of the state government. For instance, an

affidavit on stamp paper, mentioning verifiable facts and supporting evidence, tends to be more useful than a general complaint.

Community action

As mentioned earlier, lack of community participation is a common problem with programmes like the midday meal scheme. Here are some things that can be done to promote community participation:

- Make regular enquiries from children about the quality of midday meals: how nutritious the meal is, whether the children like it, whether anyone fell ill after eating the midday meal, and so on.
- Attend meetings of the School Management Committee (SMC) and draw the attention of the SMC to any irregularities that have come to your notice.
- Insist on regular monitoring of midday meals by the SMC.
- Raise issues relating to midday meals in the Gram Panchayat or Gram Sabha, and ask for accounts to be made available for examination.
- Ensure “surveillance” of the food delivery arrangements and expenditure of funds.
- Demand swift action against corrupt officials in the event of any misuse of funds.

- Collect funds to enhance the quality of midday meals by buying utensils, improving the infrastructure, providing richer meals on special occasions, and so on. One way of doing this is to organise a *chanda* (collection of voluntary donations) from time to time.
- Ensure that the appointments of cooks and helpers are made in a fair and transparent manner, and that preference is given to Dalit women. If needed, facilitate the acceptance of Dalit cooks in the community.
- Help to enhance the capacities of cooks and helpers so that the midday meal is safe, nutritious and tasty.
- Facilitate the involvement of Mahila Mandals and Self Help Groups in monitoring and implementation of midday meals.
- Spread awareness of the Supreme Court orders among all concerned: teachers, parents, village leaders, and even local officials if needed.

Advocacy and media

Some problems are difficult to resolve through local action, and require policy changes at higher levels. For instance, if the budget allocation for midday meals is low, the local headmaster and even the Block Education Officer may not be able to do much about it. This is because budget allocations are decided by the state government.

BOX 8: COMMUNITY ACTION FOR MIDDAY MEALS IN ANDHRA PRADESH*

There have been many creative initiatives of community mobilisation for midday meals. During the last 14 years, the MV Foundation has worked with village communities in Andhra Pradesh for universal schooling and the abolition of child labour. Local committees of the Child Rights Protection Forum (CRPF) were formed in many villages, and existing committees (such as Gram Panchayats and School Education Committees) were also activated.

When midday meals began, these committees tried to ensure that the scheme was implemented. The community contributed generously. For instance, in Kondakal village (Ranga Reddy District), the Gram Panchayat donated plates and glasses. And in Chittoor District, several School Education Committees raised funds to construct kitchen sheds.

The midday meal scheme is run through the Scheduled Caste mahila sanghas. Initially the programme faced much resistance as upper-caste children refused to eat food prepared by Dalit cooks. In such instances meetings were organised with the parents, teachers and School Education Committees and the significance of the midday meal was explained. As a result of such meetings in most schools, children of all castes began to eat together.

In Ambatpally village (Mahaboobnagar District), for instance, many upper-caste children dropped out because Dalit cooks had been appointed. So a CRPF meeting was held to convince parents to send their children back to school. When the parents refused, CRPF decided that it needed more time to solve this problem. A door-to-door motivation campaign was held and parents were spoken to individually. Some of them agreed to send their children, and allow them to eat with everybody else. A meeting was then organised in the village for which the Mandal Education Officer and other dignitaries were also invited. After this most children came back to school, and slowly children of all castes began eating the midday meal prepared by Dalit cooks.

In most of the villages where such mobilisation has taken place, the provision of midday meals is regular and caste tensions have been resolved. But the struggle to ensure a good quality meal continues. In many villages, children get only plain rice and dal. However, in other villages there has been more sustained community pressure and eggs, fruits and vegetables are also given.

* Contributed by Dipa Sinha.

Achieving policy changes requires organised advocacy. This involves activities like lobbying Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs), sending petitions to the Chief Minister, organising rallies in the state capital, writing in the newspapers, and so on. Here are some demands that can be made in this context:

- The state government should give more money for midday meals.
- Provision should be made for kitchen sheds and other basic infrastructure in all schools.
- The state government should issue clear Guidelines on midday meals, disseminate them, and ensure that they are observed.
- Midday meals should be provided during school holidays, at least in drought-affected areas.
- There should be a strict ban on the supply of midday meals from private contractors.
- Special attention should be paid to children who are excluded from the schooling system, e.g. child labourers and street children.

If you take up advocacy work, don't forget the media (including social media). Mass media such as daily newspapers and TV interviews are the best way of reaching a large audience in a short time. Also, politicians and bureaucrats tend to be quite concerned to avoid critical media reports, so this is a good way to keep them on their

toes. However, getting attention for social issues like midday meals in the mainstream media is not always easy. It requires taking time to write, building contacts with friendly journalists, conducting catchy investigations, organising effective press conferences, and so on. “Learning by doing” is the best approach here, but it is also useful to seek advice from people with media experience. Effective media work is hard work, but it is a powerful tool of action.

Research

Research is another useful tool of action. If you have solid facts, it will be that much harder for concerned authorities to ignore your demands.

Like media work, good research is hard work and there is no alternative to “learning by doing”. But much can be learnt from surveys and studies of midday meals conducted earlier in various states: Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and West Bengal, among others. Many of these studies are available on the website of the right to food campaign (www.righttofoodcampaign.in). Also on this website, you will find samples of survey questionnaires, guidelines for field investigators, and related material. Some further material is also available on the “old” campaign website (www.righttofoodindia.org)

BOX 9: THE MIDDAY MEAL CAMPAIGN IN JHARKHAND

There have been lively campaigns for midday meals in many states during the last few years. These campaigns have played a key role in persuading the state governments to implement the Supreme Court order of 28 November 2001.

To illustrate, consider Jharkhand. The campaign for midday meals there began with the “Dhanbad appeal”, issued on 17 February 2002 by Bharat Gyan Vigyan Samiti (BGVS). The appeal drew attention to the Supreme Court order of 28 November 2001 and called for a “day of action” on 9 April 2002. The highlight of this day of action was a “people’s school meal” organised by local communities. The aim was to shame the government and show that people were tired of waiting for the implementation of the Supreme Court order.

This action day was preceded by a major programme of awareness generation using posters, leaflets, wall painting, street plays, etc. On 9 April 2002, many organisations joined the day of action. A people’s school meal was prepared in hundreds of schools with the involvement of Panchayats, Gram Sabhas, teachers, and the general public. In Ranchi, some 2,500 children gathered at the Town Hall to demand the introduction of midday meals in primary schools.

Another agitation took place on 11 July 2002. Hundreds of children marched to the Chief Minister’s residence in Ranchi. Ignoring Section 144 and slipping around security guards, they invaded his house and gave him a petition. The Chief Minister listened sympathetically and promised to look into the matter.

However, the Jharkhand Government continued to drag its feet. In November 2003, there was another wave of campaign activities including an extensive signature campaign, another “people’s school meal”, a “bal sansad” (children’s parliament), and a sit-in outside the Secretariat.

In response to these agitations, the Jharkhand Government finally introduced midday meals in primary schools in December 2003. As elsewhere, there were many problems in the initial phase, including logistic problems, cases of food poisoning, and some resistance from upper-caste parents. However, the reach and quality of midday meals is steadily improving over time.

A survey conducted by Gram Swaraj Abhiyan in late 2004 found that midday meals were being served every day in most of the sample schools. The quality of food was generally considered “good” by the parents, and major increases in school attendance were observed, especially among girls and disadvantaged children. All the teachers except one wanted midday meals to continue.

Today, school children in Jharkhand are enjoying a much improved midday meal menu, including eggs three times a week.

Working Together

The campaign for universal, nutritious midday meals in Indian schools is rapidly becoming a broad-based people's movement. Many organisations and individuals around the country are taking up this issue in their own way. It may be a good idea to check who is working on this in your area or state, and to link up with other like-minded people. United action is especially important for successful advocacy with the state governments.

A good place to start searching for like-minded people is the right to food campaign, an informal network of individuals and organisations committed to the realisation of the right to food in India. For advice on how to contact the campaign, see the Appendix of this booklet.

Last but not least: if you found this Primer helpful please help to disseminate it. Here are some ways in which this can be done:

- Organising a group discussion of this Primer in your village or organisation.
- Arranging a translation in the local language, if it is not available already.
- Using portions of this Primer to prepare posters and leaflets. For instance, Box 3 with the Supreme Court orders could be used to make a poster for display in the local school or Panchayat Bhawan.

- Distributing or selling copies of this Primer in your area. Bulk orders can be sent to the secretariat of the right to food campaign, at the address given in the Appendix.

And please remember that we are interested in your comments and suggestions on this Primer.

The campaign for universal midday meals is important not just from the point of view of children's rights. It is also an opportunity to "educate, agitate and organize" on a wide range of issues: gender inequality, caste discrimination, corruption, state accountability, political priorities, among others. It is also a significant example of how legal action can be used to assert economic and social rights. Last but not least, it shows that organized action can make a difference!



FURTHER RESOURCES

If you have access to the internet, please take a look at the website of the right to food campaign (righttofoodcampaign.in). This website (along with its precursor, righttofoodindia.org) has a lot of material on midday meals and related aspects of the right to food, including:

- The full text of Supreme Court orders on the right to food.
- Information on the status of midday meals in different states.
- A summary of the official Guidelines on midday meals.
- A soft copy of this Primer, and also of the Hindi translation.
- A more detailed Handbook on midday meals.
- Guidelines for conducting field surveys of midday meals.
- Lots of articles and field reports on midday meals.
- Links to related sites.

The official midday meal website (mdm.nic.in) is also a useful resource. It contains official circulars, guidelines, the Mid-Day Meal Rules 2015, status of midday meals in different states and other material.

You can also contact the office of the Commissioners (see below for details) or the secretariat of the Right to Food Campaign for guidance (see the back cover for details).

Office of the Commissioners of the Supreme Court:

B 68, 2nd Floor, Sarvodaya Enclave, New Delhi 110017

Tel: 011-26851335/339. Fax: 011-41829631.

Email: sc.commissioners@gmail.com

Website: www.sccommissioners.org

Note: The Commissioners have an “advisor” in many states, you can check his or her name and address from the Commissioners’ office. If you notice any violation of Supreme Court orders in your area, and if you are unable to obtain redressal from local authorities, please contact the Commissioners or their advisor in your state.



If you found this primer useful, please share it with others and help to disseminate it widely. There are many ways of doing this, such as:

- Organizing a group discussion on this primer in your village or mohalla.
- Using sections of this primer to make posters or parchas. The posters can be put up in public places such as the local school, anganwadi, Panchayat Bhawan etc.
- Distributing or selling copies of this primer.
- Translating this primer in the local languages (there is no copyright!).

Copies of this Primer, and of other Primers in this series (in English and Hindi), are available from the Secretariat of the Right to Food Campaign – see back cover.



IN THIS SERIES

1. **Haq ki Ladai**
2. **Right to Information Act 2005: A Primer**
3. **National Rural Employment Guarantee Act 2005:
A Primer**
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